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ABSTRACT

Schools mirror society. Both are struggling with issues that threaten not only the learning process, but human development as well. The underpinnings of all school activities are in large part drawn from the field of psychology. Today, as education reform gains momentum, the scientific knowledge and practice expertise of psychologists are increasingly critical to the educational system. In collaboration with educators and other concerned groups and individuals, psychologists are working to build a nation of productive citizens for the 21st century. As specialists in human behavior, psychologists are uniquely prepared to help advance the effort to integrate the comprehensive health, education, social, and preventive services that today's school problems demand. Psychologists can help train educators and service providers to develop joint strategies for solving major problems. Some of the key and complex roles that psychology is playing in conceptualizing and implementing fundamental educational change are discussed in relation to each of the eight national education goals. Chapters are: (1) Why Psychology Is Important to Education Reform; (2) The Roles Psychologists Can Play in Improving America's Schools; (3) Psychology's Response to the National Education Goals; and (4) Suggested Readings. (JBJ)

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Reforming America's Schools: Psychology's Role

A Report to the Nation's Educators

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American Psychological Association

APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education
Education Directorate

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Concern about American education is not new. It was in 1983, however, that *A Nation at Risk*, an assessment of the status of American education by the National Commission on Education, catapulted awareness of problems with the educational system onto the national agenda. The pressing question posed by the commission was: Are our schools preparing our students and, by extension, our nation, to compete in the emerging global marketplace?

To address this issue, President Bush convened an Education Summit in 1989, attended by the nation's governors. From this meeting emerged a series of national education goals slated for attainment by the year 2000.

But worry about the American education system continued to surface. *Beyond Rhetoric*, the 1991 report of the National Commission on Children, attested that, as a nation, America must set a new course to protect the interests of children and strengthen families. The commission posed a national agenda to "help America move beyond the rhetoric, to make children and families the expression of our national conscience and the foundation of sound and progressive policy in the years ahead."

A year later, *Raising Standards for American Education*, a report to Congress from the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST), found that "the absence of explicit national standards keyed to world class levels of performance severely hampers our ability to monitor the Nation's progress toward the National Education Goals."

In response to this rising tide of concern, Congress in 1994 passed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. By expanding and codifying a set of education goals derived from the Education Summit, the legislation proposed a national policy on education reform that extends far beyond the schoolhouse and is emerging as a blueprint for addressing the public's lack of faith in our public schools.

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APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education

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Why Psychology Is Important to Education Reform

ACROSS THE NATION, educators and students start each school day teaching and learning, developing as individuals, and helping others acquire the knowledge and demonstrate the competencies needed to be productive, vital citizens. Schools mirror society. Both are struggling with issues that threaten not only the learning process but human development as well. Bold actions and new solutions are required.

The underpinnings of all school activities — the knowledge upon which our education system is based — are in large part drawn from the field of psychology. Today, as education reform gains momentum, the scientific knowledge and practice expertise of psychologists are increasingly critical to our educational system. In collaboration with educators and other concerned groups and individuals, psychologists are working to build a nation of learners and productive citizens for the twenty-first century and enhancing opportunities for students and school staff to thrive in the spirit of America's evolving education reform.

Psychologists are working to build a nation of productive citizens for the 21st century.

Although education reform has broad dimensions, many reform initiatives focus on the eight goals set forth in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Establishing a framework for providing comprehensive services to children, adults, and school systems, the goals take into account not only the formal education requirements of students in grades K–12 but also their physical and mental health status, social needs, psychological development, and support systems. The goals establish a road map for reform, but education reform is more than just the national education goals. True school reform must be comprehensive and multifaceted; it must involve whole communities.

This education reform initiative, in part or whole, is being adapted by many states and local school districts to their own needs. Ultimate success depends on a coordinated, integrated, and interdisciplinary effort that involves educators; parents; extended family members; social service, health, welfare, and juvenile justice agencies; businesses; and entire communities.

Indeed, to ensure consistency with the goals of education reform, virtually every state and local legislative initiative related to children today includes specific language to ensure consistency with national reform goals. Similar language also appears in such diverse initiatives as legislation dealing with youth violence, juvenile justice, education research, and educational technology.

The Roles Psychologists Can Play in Improving America's Schools

PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE SPECIALISTS IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR. As such, they are uniquely prepared to help advance the increasingly concerted effort to integrate the comprehensive health, education, social, and preventive services that today's school problems demand.

Although psychologists within the school setting are best known for providing assessment, counseling, and consultation services to individuals and small groups, their training and experience also provide a strong foundation for assistance with numerous other facets of educational reform. In addition, many psychologists in other specialties — for example, educational psychology, counseling psychology, and clinical psychology — are also working with educators to integrate services. Some of the specific contributions psychologists are already making are discussed below.

Child Development. Recent health and education legislation recognizes that matching programming and instruction to the developmental level of the child is particularly important as schools move beyond providing traditional instruction toward linking education with other relevant services. Such integration requires increased sensitivity to and knowledge of whole-child developmental characteristics. If school instructional and health programs are not both age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate, they risk being neither intelligible nor pertinent to the students they target. Researchers in school psychology, child development, and education have been key contributors to identifying the developmental hallmarks of childhood and adolescence and thus have a long history of bringing students to and through the milestones of learning.

Examples. Psychologists work with teachers to assess curriculum characteristics and student performance levels. Such comparisons give teachers valuable data on appropriate entry levels and performance expectations. At the systems level, psychologists collaborate with teachers and administrators to determine developmentally appropriate curricula and program materials for schools.

Behavioral Health. American educators are increasingly concerned with the effect of children's health on school performance and the effect of health-risk behaviors that not only have a profoundly negative effect on learning and school functioning, but could also lead to loss of life. The most prominent of such behaviors are

- Tobacco, alcohol, and other drug abuse.
- Sexual behavior resulting in infection with the human immunodeficiency virus or other sexually transmitted diseases or unintended pregnancy.
- Violent behavior resulting in intentional and unintentional injuries.
- Dietary patterns and sedentary lifestyles resulting in disease.

Psychologists have been important contributors to research on the prevalence and nature of such risk behaviors and to the school's role in understanding, preventing, and treating behavior-based health problems.

Examples. Psychologists develop comprehensive prevention programs for schools and communities to deal with violence and substance abuse. They also provide counseling and other mental health services. Finally, psychologists provide crisis intervention services for schools and communities in cases of trauma or disaster.

Curriculum Integration. Recognition of the effects of health and social factors on learning and school performance means that schools today have to deal with many aspects of life that once were considered outside their province. Teachers have to address violence, discipline problems, substance abuse, and social alienation at the same time they are teaching. Integrating academic learning with handling such other matters — and also enlisting the cooperation of parents and the community at many levels — are vital, growing needs in American education.

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Ensuring the effective adoption, validation, and dissemination of comprehensive curricular models and program strategies is essential. With their dual training in psychological principles and educational practice, school and educational psychologists are well-suited to help educators effectively incorporate such comprehensive programs into the school curriculum. Many bring a unique combination of psychological and educational expertise and experience to the task.

Examples. Psychologists infuse knowledge of psychology and behavioral health into content areas, such as health education and substance abuse prevention. Doing so increases the relevance and impact of intervention activities and minimizes the disruptive effect of additional curriculum requirements imposed on teachers and students.

Psychologists can help train educators and service providers to develop joint strategies for solving major problems.

Services Integration. One important facet of recent education reform legislation is the emphasis on a much broader and more coordinated educative focus. Because parents, peers, and communities are central to children's development and learning, their involvement in education is crucial. Failure to address the behaviors and characteristics of individuals and groups that affect children limits the potential effectiveness of classroom interventions. Psychologists' skills in assessment and organizational and group dynamics make them strong candidates for helping school districts and communities pool resources and integrate services.

Examples. Psychologists working within a services integration model collaborate with colleagues in school social work and counseling, as well as with personnel agencies outside the school. Together, they assess family and student needs, plan comprehensive interventions, and implement strategies designed to support the family and student.

Staff Development and Technical Assistance. With major changes in practice mandated in education reform legislation, school-based educational personnel, community-service providers, and others involved in school-community linkages must accrue additional knowledge and skills. Psychologists are a valuable resource for such staff development and technical assistance, providing important information in at least two crucial areas.

First, interprofessional education and practice continues to be a weak link in the delivery net of integrated services. Lack of skill in working with other professions and agencies may exacerbate the much-documented fragmentation of services to children that education reform aims to ameliorate. Through their training in group process, consultation, and interdisciplinary teaming, psychologists can help train educators and service providers to work together on developing strategies to resolve major social, health, and educational problems.

Second, parents, community members, and the students themselves are rich resources for planning, implementing, and evaluating services to children. These

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groups are increasingly included in education planning. However, without considerable emphasis on systematic training and support, their effectiveness will be minimal. Psychologists often have considerable expertise in providing training and technical assistance to people who are now recognized as important partners in education.

Examples. Psychologists are integral to continuing teacher and administrator preparation in the areas of prevention, assessment, discipline, and the psychological foundations of learning. Additionally, psychologists provide instruction to teachers and administrators on team building, stress management, parent training, and organizational change.

PSYCHOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION REFORM

Cutting Edge Activities

Child development

Behavioral health care

Curriculum integration

Service-integration leadership and coordination between schools and communities

Program evaluation and systems research

System needs assessment, planning, and evaluation of educational outcomes

Reframing schools

Ongoing Activities

Individual and group assessment

Counseling and therapy

Consultation

Staff training and continuing professional development

Technical assistance

Crisis intervention

Prevention (violence, dropout, substance abuse, teen pregnancy)

Parent and family education and support

Employee assistance programs

Teaching psychology and psychological principles

Sports psychology

Program Evaluation and Systems Research. To ensure that services are effective and are based on the needs of children and their families, the new reform initiatives emphasize a data-driven approach. Psychologists' extensive training in data collection and data analysis provides schools and communities with readily available measurement tools. Psychologists with skills in needs assessment, epidemiological research, and quantitative research design can also help schools and communities target problems more accurately. Their expertise in program evaluation and statistical analysis techniques can help determine the effectiveness of education innovations. And their understanding of the complex nature of learning within the context of schools and communities will help promote systemic changes that serve all children.

Examples. Psychologists provide specific expertise in determining the efficiency and efficacy of instructional and prevention programs. They also conduct epidemiological and organizational research that helps schools and communities assess their needs.

Reframing Schools. Continuing changes in our society mean that our schools and communities must adapt to the needs and characteristics of their constituents while still providing the stability and security that are the hallmarks of these institutions. As a result, schools and communities are being asked — more and more frequently — to examine and alter their fundamental structures and functions.

School restructuring, site-based management, and school-community linkages are among the current efforts to reconstitute schools so they can improve their effectiveness and functioning. American business, which has offered to draw on its experience to help schools improve organizational and management practices, frequently employs psychologists with training in organizational behavior. These psychologists are also available to help schools and communities reexamine and reformulate their operations and structure so they can better meet the needs of their populations.

Examples. Psychologists' expertise in systems change and effective organization provides the tools for reorganizing schools to meet community needs. Psychologists promote shared decision making and participative leadership at the school, system, and community levels. Furthermore, psychologists link school and community leaders to reorganize service delivery systems so that the systems are consumer-oriented and can support efficient learning opportunities.

Psychology's Response to the National Education Goals

SOME OF THE KEY AND COMPLEX ROLES that psychology is playing in conceptualizing and implementing fundamental education change are discussed below in relation to each of the eight national education goals. Although by no means exhaustive, the discussion highlights the kinds of contributions psychology can make to education reform, from assisting with day-to-day decision making to implementing violence prevention programs that have both short-term and long-term benefits.

GOAL 1

Ready to Learn

By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

Goal Priorities. Goal 1 emphasizes the need for proper child nutrition; physical and mental health care, including prenatal health systems; physical education; high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs; and training and support for the child's first teachers — the parents.

Psychology's Response. Psychology's contribution to understanding the course of prenatal and postnatal child development is well known. This information has been used to design prevention and early intervention programs that promote the intellectual, emotional, social, and educational growth of infants and toddlers; most notable are the nationwide programs: Head Start and, more recently, Healthy Start.

As psychologists expand their services in these programs and work with other disciplines to provide services through school-based and school-linked health centers, students will be even better prepared to start the path to formal learning.

In addition, psychologists have been instrumental in advocating that Goal 1 apply to all students, not only preschool children. It is essential to provide the services that enable students in all grades to start each day ready to learn. For example, some students come to school unprepared to benefit from focused instruction because of family conflict or poverty. Through prevention and early intervention services, psychologists can work with school staff and students to ensure that the physical, emotional, behavioral, and motivational needs of children and adolescents are addressed and the stage is set for learning.

GOAL 2

School Completion

By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

Goal Priorities. Goal 2 highlights the need to reduce the incidence of school dropouts, increase the number of

people from minority groups who graduate from high school, and provide alternative course work leading to the GED for individuals not following a traditional high school program.

Psychology's Response. The work of psychologists in reducing student alienation and social isolation is essential in tackling this issue. Psychologists have developed successful dropout prevention programs and addressed issues that deal with student motivation and curriculum relevance. As a result, they have added to knowledge about the factors that lead to school failure and the kinds of individual and system interventions that can alleviate the problem. By working as partners with other concerned professionals and the community-at-large, psychologists can implement and evaluate comprehensive, wrap-around programs designed to motivate students to attend school and participate actively in the learning process.

GOAL 3

Student Achievement and Citizenship

By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they will be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy.

Goal Priorities. Goal 3 stresses the need for students to be able to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge, write and communicate effectively, exhibit good citizenship and personal responsibility, volunteer for community service, and participate in physical and health education.

Psychology's Response. Psychology has a major role to play in achieving Goal 3 because of its historic work in setting standards for psychological and educational assessment. With new forms of assessment being developed at the state level to determine if content-based standards in the various subject areas are being met, educators are looking as never before to psychology as a leader in evaluating reform innovations. Additionally, psychologists' research and interventions in problem-solving and other cognitive processes are essential tools for teaching efficient and effective use of mental capabilities.

Another need is to ensure that the teaching of psychology is conducted according to the highest academic rigor. The American Psychological Association has therefore initiated a project to establish the same kinds of standards for teaching high school psychology that apply to the core academic areas enumerated in Goal 3. This important initiative will place psychology side by side with those academic content areas as a central, well-articulated scientific discipline for high school study.

GOAL 4

Teacher Education and Professional Development

By the year 2000, the Nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.

Goal Priorities. Goal 4 prescribes the access to preservice teacher education and continuing professional development opportunities that educators need to teach an increasingly diverse student population that has a variety of education, social, and health needs. It emphasizes the need for teachers and other school staff to have continuing opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to teach challenging subject matter and to use emerging new methods, forms of assessment, and technologies. Recruiting a highly talented work force of teachers, administrators, and other educators is also a part of this goal.

Psychology's Response. Psychologists understand how and why people of all ages learn; they are also expert in human behavior. Working with other content professionals to achieve Goal 4, psychologists will continue drawing on their research-based knowledge to consult with teachers on effective teaching methods, principles of learning, and motivational strategies that enhance student achievement. With their knowledge of individual differences and learning styles, psychologists will also collaborate with other school

staff to tailor instructional programs for the teachers and other adults involved in teaching preschool through grade 12 students.

Academic psychologists are also gearing up to assist state departments of education and local school systems to address Goal 4 by offering a range of flexible learning opportunities. Although traditional university-based instruction continues to be the core method for acquiring knowledge, psychologists in universities across the nation are developing night, weekend, and summer training opportunities. In this way, teachers can teach and still carve out some time to acquire additional skills in targeted areas. Furthermore, innovative university psychology programs are collaborating with their university counterparts in education to offer on-site training to school administrators, teachers, and other education support personnel.

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GOAL 5

Mathematics and Science

By the year 2000, United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.

Goal Priorities. Goal 5 mandates an early education in science and mathematics, including metrics; increasing teachers' substantive background in these areas; and increasing the number of women and minorities who earn degrees in mathematics, science, and engineering.

Psychology's Response. Psychological measurement expertise, in and of itself, is useful in determining progress toward achieving Goal 5. As a science-based discipline, the field of psychology also has a responsibility to promote the acquisition, utilization, and evaluation of scientific knowledge. For example, the newly emerging knowledge base of cognitive psychology applied to mathematical thinking offers exciting possibilities for furthering scientific achievement. New principles of learning theory, which are developed by educational and cognitive psychologists, will guide knowledge acquisition, application, and retention in this content area and others.

GOAL 6

Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning

By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Goal Priorities. Goal 6 highlights the business-education connection, emphasizing new technologies and work methods, vocational and technical programs, and training for part-time and midcareer students. Adult literacy, comprehensive parent involvement and training programs, and lifelong learning opportunities are also components of Goal 6.

Psychology's Response. Psychology's contribution to adult learning and individualized instruction is well documented. Psychological researchers, for example, have made major strides in understanding literacy. Further, psychologists have been leaders in developing interventions that reduce adult illiteracy through programs such as those developed by the National Center on Adult Literacy. In addition, social psychologists have helped develop interventions that facilitate acquiring the interpersonal skills that boost work performance.

As our nation educates the new labor force to compete in the global marketplace of the twenty-first century, we will need to apply psychological principles regarding instruction and workplace competence across a range of disciplines. New, learner-friendly technologies developed by psychologists with expert knowledge in this area increasingly will be related to real-world learning.

GOAL 7

Safe, Disciplined, and Alcohol- and Drug-Free Schools

By the year 2000, every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Goal Priorities. Goal 7 addresses the need to develop school policies regarding drug and alcohol use and possession, and school safety, including the presence of weapons, and to develop programs and use community teams to address these problems. In this regard, there is an emphasis on making K–12 drug and alcohol prevention education programs part of a sequential, comprehensive health education program. Elimination of sexual harassment is also one facet of this goal.

Psychology's Response. Creating the safe and healthy behaviors implicit in Goal 7 is a traditional strength of psychological practice and research. The focus on achieving safe, disciplined, drug-free schools, for example, calls for behavior management and an organizational climate that prevent youth violence and substance abuse, all dimensions of psychological research and practice both within and outside the schools.

Through some fifty years of study, research by psychologists has determined that violence is not an inevitable consequence of the human condition, but a learned behavior. Today psychologists are helping schools work toward establishing safe environments by developing curricula that focus on violence prevention and reduction of aggression. Psychologists also identify children who have emotional and behavioral problems related to violence, and they institute intervention programs that help children learn nonviolent solutions to problems. Such efforts teach children to recognize anger and develop techniques that inhibit aggressive responses. Psychologists also help students develop such social skills as interpersonal problem solving, negotiation, and mediation of disputes among peers.

GOAL

8

Parental Participation

By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

Goal Priorities. Goal 8 focuses on creating home-school partnership programs, specifically addressing work with parents of children who are disadvantaged, speak English as a second language, or have disabilities. Emphasis is on encouraging families to support the academic work of children at home, share educational decision making, support the education system, and hold schools and students to high standards of accountability.

Psychology's Response. Decades of psychological research on the learning process can help parents facilitate their children's educational growth. Psychologists can help create programs that bring parents into the schoolhouse and ultimately involve them in their children's education. They can collaborate with other school staff to establish outreach and community education programs that give parents information about child development and learning, and recruit them as active partners in the education process. Psychological research has shown, for example, that children whose parents read to them during the toddler years grow up to be better readers, and that parental praise is more important than material reward in fostering academic achievement.

Psychologists can also assist school personnel in working with parents and other community partners, such as businesses; social service, health, welfare, and juvenile justice agencies; and religious organizations to provide comprehensive and coordinated services tailored to meet the needs of learners of all ages and their families.

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Suggested Readings

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THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY will offer bold challenges and opportunities for America. Educating the next generation of American leaders must be a top priority. As the education reform movement continues, psychologists' scientific knowledge and practice experience are indispensable to meaningful change. Psychologists are essential partners with educators in building national learners and productive citizens.

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APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education

Education Directorate

The APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education (CPSE) was established in 1994 to promote the consistent presence of the field of psychology in policy and programs for schools and education. The center also raises awareness of the profession's commitment to schools and education among APA members; national, state, and local policymakers; and the general public. Another center function is to increase the credibility and effectiveness of psychologists in serving as advocates for policies related to education reform and in securing external funding for research and educational development. The center develops, advocates for, and monitors policy on national and state education issues.

To achieve these ends, the center coordinates the planning, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives both within and outside APA. External efforts include federal, state, and regional advocacy of policies and practices related to education and liaison and information exchange with national educational and scientific societies, other professions, federal agencies, and the general public. The center also coordinates APA programs that bring the knowledge and methods of psychology to bear on social reforms related to schools and education by working with APA directorates, divisions, and state psychological associations.

For more information on how psychologists can help implement school reform initiatives, call the APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education, 202/336-5970.

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